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The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Telltale Traces of CIA Cache Found

By Jack Anderson

My associate Les Whitten has just returned from a treasure hunt for buried CIA cash in the Florida Keys where pirates once stashed Spanish gold.

He found one cache where thousands in molding \$20 bills had been buried. But someone had reached the secret site ahead of him. All Whitten found were six weathered, matted \$20 bills that apparently had been dropped about 200 yards away.

In an earlier column, we reported that the Central Intelligence Agency had delivered bales of \$20 bills to Cuban exile leaders to finance clandestine operations against Communist Cuba.

Assassination teams, sabotage squads and commando units were sent against Castro after the abortive Bays of Pigs invasion. These missions apparently were halted after President Kennedy's assassination. But the CIA continued to slip infiltration teams into Cuba to gather intelligence.

The CIA paid all expenses, apparently, in cash. Huge sums were turned over to exile leaders, who gave no accounting of how they spent it.

There were whispers that some money had disappeared into private bank accounts, that other thousands were bur-

ied in former pirate lairs in the Florida keys.

Secret CIA Site

One who perked up his ears over the whispers was Bradley Ayers, a former Army captain, who was on loan to the CIA in 1963-64 to train Cuban assault teams. One training site had been located on Upper Key Largo on land that the Monroe County tax assessor's office identified as belonging to the University of Miami.

The CIA also operated out of a front, called Zenith Technical Enterprises, on the university's south campus. Thus the respected university, wittingly or otherwise, provided the site for an extension course in infiltration and demollition.

Ayers learned enough from his former trainees to figure out where some of the CIA money might be hidden. He told us he discovered a half-buried suitcase full of molding, mutilated \$20 bills.

The suitcase was in a remote spot that he was confident wouldn't be discovered. He took out a dozen bills to make sure they weren't counterfeit. Banks redeemed all but two badly weathered \$20 bills.

Then Ayers' house was mysteriously broken into and records of his find were taken. Fearing the CIA or Cuban exiles were watching him, he dared not return to the cache.

However, he told us his story and showed us the bank records. We also checked out his veracity carefully. I sent Les Whitten to accompany him back to the keys to recover the CIA money. We notified the Treasury Department, in general terms, that all recovered CIA cash would be turned over to the Treasury.

Treasure Hunt

Whitten, Ayers and Ayers' wife flew to an air strip on Upper Key Largo. Using it as a base of operations, they reconnoitered the dark mangrove thickets, sluggish canals, treacherous swamps of sea grass and crocodile-infested creeks where Ayers had once trained Cuban commandos.

For two days, they chugged through the creeks in a shallow-draft 18-foot skiff, startled occasionally by the barks of crocodiles. When they were convinced no one was following, they plunged through underbrush so thick they couldn't see four feet ahead.

Finally they came upon the bramble-cloaked site where Ayers said he had discovered the suitcase. The soil at the hiding place had been turned up and sifted for 10 yards in all directions. The underbrush and sea grass were trampled as if by many feet.

The suitcase full of currency was gone. Disappointed, they combed the area. Within a quarter mile, Whitten spotted a tattered \$20 bill. Ayers found two more, then Whitten

discovered a sheaf of three bills matted together with mud and grass.

The bills were near scraps of a road map, which Ayers said had been used as a wrapper for the suitcase bills. Treasury records show the bills were printed between April, 1966, and August, 1968. There is no way to prove this was part of the money which the CIA continued to provide anti-Castro exiles. But the stories that led to the cache came in part to Ayers from Cubans he helped train for the CIA.

Washington Whirl

Volunteer Army—President Nixon is leading the opposition to his own proposal for a volunteer Army—at least for the next two years. At a secret White House legislative conference, he warned GOP congressional leaders: "Some votes to end the draft may look popular temporarily. But in the long view, our recommendations (to extend the draft for two years) will prove to be right." White House aide Peter Flanigan explained to the leaders that "A short-fall of 100,000 men is expected" next year. He described the administration's plans to encourage volunteers by offering financial incentives, including a \$3,000 bonus to those who will re-enlist for combat duty. But he warned this "would mean cuts in other vital areas in the Defense Department."

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CIA Plotted to Blast Cuba Refinery

By Jack Anderson

The full, fantastic story of the Bay of Pigs has been buried for 10 years deep in the Central Intelligence Agency's fortress-like headquarters near Langley, Va.

All the world knows that CIA-trained Cuban exiles stormed ashore on a Cuban beachhead and were cut to pieces by Dictator Fidel Castro's militiamen 10 years ago today. But the CIA has concealed from the world how it continued to send assassination teams and commando squads against Castro.

Bit by bit, stories of these post-invasion sorties are leaking out. We have already revealed, for example, how the CIA used a swashbuckling underworld figure, John Roselli, to make six unsuccessful assassination attempts upon Castro.

The CIA assigned two trusted agents, Billy Harvey and "Big Jim" O'Connell, to direct the murder missions. On the first two tries, Roselli's assassins sought to slip poison pellets into Castro's food. The next four attempts were made by sniper teams equipped with high-powered Belgian rifles, explosives and two-way radios.

There were midnight powerboat dashes to secret landing spots on the Cuban coast and machine-gun exchanges in the dark of night with Cuban patrol boats. The last assas-

sination team actually reached a Havana rooftop within rifle range of Castro. But like the others, this squad also was caught and tortured.

Refinery Raid

Now we have learned of a CIA plot to blow up Cuba's most productive oil refinery. Painstaking preparations were made, and a commando team was given intensive training.

Using U-2 photos so detailed that they showed every bush, Maj. Edward Roderick, an Army engineer on loan to the CIA, constructed a mockup of the plant. He even figured out how mortars could be pre-aimed, then placed by commandos in a precise spot and fired on the run.

But he junked the idea because a human error of an inch or two could send a mortar shell into an inhabited area. Then the whole plan was junked after President Kennedy's assassination.

We have also learned that the CIA scattered \$20 bills around like green confetti to finance the clandestine anti-Castro operations. Bales of money were delivered to Cuban exile leaders, who gave no accounting of how they spent it.

Some were strangled by men since killed. Other thousands were buried in former pirate lairs in the Florida Keys. Still more thousands were strewn on the beaches of Cuba where would-be raiders left their bones.

Yet some of the raiders survived. One of them, a young ex-Army captain named Bradley Ayers, has emerged from under cover. He has given us access to his notes, documents and draft chapters of a book he is writing about his raids for the CIA.

"The Cuban experience," he told us, "has been a plague on the national conscience as it has been on mine. I think it's high time that at least part of the story be told."

CIA Assignment

A former paratrooper, pilot and demolitions expert, Captain Ayers was training rangiers at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., when he received orders to report to the Army's Special Activities Group in Washington.

He was put through physical, psychiatric and lie detector examinations for a week, then he was hustled over to the CIA's Cuban section.

He was questioned for three days by CIA officials who, finally satisfied, provided him with a cover story, phony documents and a ticket to Miami. He adopted the name Daniel B. Williams and was assigned to a CIA front called Paragon Air Service.

The CIA lodged Ayers and Roderick in a luxurious beach house in Key Biscayne. The two undercover Army men worked out of a CIA front—a columned building with the cover name of Zenith Technical Enterprises—on the south-

campus of Miami University. Through its doors passed some of the nation's most secret operatives: the dinner John Roselli, rugged Bill Harvey, "Rip" Robertson and a huge New Mexican remembered only as "The Big Indian."

Ayers got the assignment of training a tough Cuban cadre in the swamps of the Everglades and the beaches of the Keys. He was supposed to teach them enough surf landing skill, underwater swimming, demolition, boat handling and simple survival for them to lead commandos into Cuba to blow up the multi-million-dollar refinery.

The story of their night landings in Cuba and the great oil refinery raid will be told in a future column.

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